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ABSTRACT

Conducted in 45 secondary schools having an enrollment of 200 or fewer in grades 7-12, the survey examined the singular problems and issues of concern as seen by teachers and administrators. The schools, located within 300 miles of Lubbock, Texas, did not represent underprivileged areas; and though they were often located in geographically isolated communities, easy travel conditions put the people in relatively frequent contact with neighboring towns and cities. A three-part questionnaire was mailed to 64 schools. Of these, 45 responded, representing individual questionnaires from approximately 360 teachers and administrators. Four of the responding schools were visited for informal discussion and impression gathering. Questionnaire items dealt with school size, location, the best and worst feature of small schools, and the future of the small school. Data reported for each item consisted of the number of responses made in 1 to 5 ratings, the percentages of responses in 1 to 5 ratings, and a mean response obtained by averaging the responses. Findings included: both teachers and administrators had distinctly positive opinions about the school and its educative and social functions; the outstanding feature was the existence of close human and personal relationships; strong local support often made the school the chief enterprise of the small community; and the availability of educational resources was rated as a negative factor. (NQ)

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INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR ARID
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TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

A SURVEY OF CURRENT AND FUTURE EDUCATIONAL ISSUES OF ALL WEST-TEXAS SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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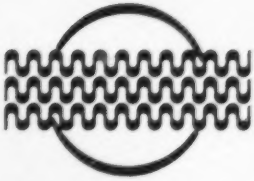

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A SURVEY OF CURRENT AND FUTURE EDUCATIONAL ISSUES OF SMALL WEST-TEXAS SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Shamus Mehaffie

Scattered over West Texas from Fort Davis in the southwest to Higgins in the northeast, small secondary schools separated by distances which often prevent consolidation are day by day carrying out their unique functions. These secondary schools of 200 or fewer students in grades seven through twelve receive little attention in these times of alarming urban problems and concern about "future shock." What are the singular problems and issues of concern in small West-Texas secondary schools as seen by teachers and administrators? Specifically, do size and location affect human relationships, availability of human and educational resources, depth and variety of course offerings, and availability of varied racial and economic mixtures in the school population? Additionally, how do teachers and administrators in small schools feel about various aspects of teaching in a small secondary school? Do they recognize teaching in a small school as markedly different from teaching in a large school? Do they feel that teacher education should give attention to "rural education"? Will the small school survive the year 2000? Should the curriculum of the small school be a miniature of that of the large school? Would they feel that children of their own could receive an "adequate" education in a small school? What are the best features and worst features of a small school?

METHOD

A survey was conducted in 45 secondary schools having an enrollment of 200 or fewer in grades seven through twelve. The schools are located within approximately 300 miles of Lubbock, Texas. Of the 64 schools to which questionnaires were mailed, 45 responded, representing individual questionnaires from approximately 360 teachers and administrators. Four of these responding schools were visited by the investigator for informal discussion and impression gathering.

A three-part questionnaire was developed which, for brevity, was limited to broad issues, covering a total of 20 items in the first two sections. See Appendix A for a copy of the questionnaire.

A scale allowing five responses was used. For the first 11 items, which dealt with effects of size and location, respondents were asked to assess factors as follows:

1–Definitely negative effect (bad influence)
2–Negative effect
3–Neutral, no effect
4–Positive effect
5–Definitely positive effect (good influence)

For the final nine items, which dealt with teaching in and with the future of the small school, the scale represented the following:

1–Completely disagree
2–Disagree
3–Neutral
4–Agree
5–Completely agree

Data reported for each item on the questionnaire consist of the number of responses made in 1 through 5 ratings, the percentages of responses in 1 through 5 ratings, and a mean response obtained by averaging the responses.

The first 11 items on the questionnaire dealt with the question, "What effect (in your opinion) do the size and location of your school have upon the following?" Data for these 11 items are reported in Appendix B.

The second portion of the questionnaire consisted of nine statements which respondents were asked to rate on an agree-disagree scale. Data for this portion appear in Appendix C.

A third part of the questionnaire asked respondents to react to the question, "Could you in a phrase or sentence indicate your opinion as to the best and worst feature of small schools?" The results appear below.

Best Feature	*Times Mentioned*
Close personal relationships	140
Students get individual or personal attention	94
Small classes with fewer problems	32
Students have opportunity for wide participation	27
Remoteness from urban problems	5
Close teacher-parent relationships	3
"Better morals and mental health"	2
Availability of community resources	1
Community support	1
"Last form of direct discipline"	1
Association with varied ethnic groups	1

Worst Feature	*Times Mentioned*
Limited curriculum and course offerings	112
Salary and financial aspects	30
Limited vocational education	29
Limited educational resource materials	18

Worst Feature (continued)	*Times Mentioned*
"No worst feature" (Note: This response was more numerous if omissions were counted.)	13
Teacher load too diverse	11
Interference by board members or community	9
Lack of ability grouping for students	9
Too many extra-curricular activities	7
Limited special and remedial education	5
Not enough students to fill elective classes	5
Good students have little competition	4
Lack of racial or cultural mix	3
Lack of cultural events	3
"Students think nobody will fail them"	3
Students have the same teacher too often	2
Lack of "all-round educational benefits"	2
"We're a small school, so don't expect too much"	2
Students are too protected	2
Teachers become too close and familiar with students	2
Colleges and large public schools have created an unfavorable image of the small school	2
Not enough career education	2
Undemocratic control	1
Lack of support for extra-curricular programs	1
Poorly prepared teachers	1
Outdated teaching methods and techniques	1
Small community is dying	1
Too much competition for students of ability to participate in various activities	1
Students get no experience in large groups	1
"Small-town problems"	1
Tendency of teachers to help students too much	1
Students become group oriented	1
Quality of education	1
Poor discipline	1

DISCUSSION

This survey was undertaken as a part of the study of semi-arid lands, in connection with the International Center for Arid and Semi-Arid Land Studies at Texas Tech University. The schools queried are located in the Panhandle and High Plains area of West Texas and the Trans-Pecos area. Appendix D is a list of the schools participating in the survey. Because of their location in a semi-arid climate and their relative isolation, they constitute a rather unique group of small scondary schools. Farming, ranching, and the production of petroleum are the main economic features of the communities in which they are located. Some of the school

districts surveyed are well financed, or above the state average, as a result of being located in oil-producing areas. Other districts are less well financed, but few if any are in the category of poverty or of very minimal financing. These schools, then, do not represent underprivileged areas, and though they are often located in geographically rather isolated communities, good roads and easy travel conditions put the people of these communities in relatively frequent contact with the neighboring towns and cities.

Four schools visited by the investigator exemplify the different types of schools represented in the survey. School A is in an area where irrigated cotton farming is paramount or almost exclusive. The community is located within 30 miles of Lubbock, Texas. A cotton gin and only a very few businesses related to farming make up the town. The school complex is modest but well kept and by far is the most attractive and lively feature of the town. The average daily attendance is approximately 335 for grades one through twelve. There are few homes or dwellings located in the town, and most students live on outlying farms and ride buses to school.

School B is also in a cotton-farming location and is virtually the same size as school A. It is also located within 30 miles of Lubbock, Texas. The town is more impressive, with several retail businesses, a cotton gin, and substantial numbers of dwellings and homes. The school complex is a blend of an old main building with a new, extremely well appointed elementary wing. Both schools A and B are in the same county and are only 12 miles apart.

School C is located in a ranching and oil-producing area. The average daily attendance is approximately 290 in grades one through twelve. The school district is the only one in the county, having fairly recently consolidated with the other district in the county. The town is the county seat and is a commercial center with several stores, a newspaper, farm implement dealers, oil-well equipment firms, and other businesses. The school is extremely well appointed, with modern facilities and immaculate maintenance. Library facilities and other educational resources are quite adequate, unusually so for such a small school. This school would be among the best financed of its size in the state.

School D is located in ranching country, with vast ranches spreading out all around the town, which is a railroad stop or layover for train crews, but which has little commercial activity other than service stations and small stores. The average daily attendance is approximately 65. The nearest town is 34 miles. Students in the district travel as much as 38 miles to attend school, coming mostly from district ranches. The school plant is well maintained and pleasant; one of the buildings still in use dates back to the turn of the century.

The foregoing brief descriptions exemplify the diversity and uniqueness of the small schools in this survey. Actually, each small school is quite close to being the heart of the community. Thus each has a distinct character all its own. Interviews with superintendents or principals of the four schools described revealed that a salient feature of the small school is the personal involvement of teachers and administrators in all aspects of the school and community. The question, "What do you think is the most important quality for a teacher in a small school?" was posed. Other than adequate preparation in subject matter, the four administrators all mentioned the need for the prospective teacher to be able to relate to the community at large and the students in particular. "Teaching" in the small school does not end at the close of class but extends, almost routinely, into involvement in extra-curricular and community activities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions seem warranted by the survey:

1. Teachers and administrators in small secondary schools have distinctly positive opinions about the small secondary school and its educative and social functions.

2. The existence of close human and personal relationships is the outstanding feature of the small secondary school.

3. Smallness can be an asset. Some small schools have some rather large classes, but the size of the school can make large classes seem small, since the teacher often knows all the students. Some elective and advanced courses offer the opportunity for individual attention because of their actual low enrollment.

4. Strong local support of the small school often makes it the chief enterprise of the small community. The positive element of this support is sometimes contrasted with the feeling among teachers and administrators that the small school is particularly vulnerable to unwarranted interference by influential community members.

5. Close pupil-pupil relationships are rated highly positive by small-school personnel. Students seem to develop significantly individual relationships. They do not feel lost in a crowd.

6. Remoteness from urban problems such as drug abuse and vandalism is a positive factor as seen by many small-school personnel. However, 102 respondents of 363 rated this factor as either negative or neutral. The remoteness seems more psychological than physical, since travel and communication are excellent. The close relationships in the community probably influence the feeling of remoteness from urban problems.

7. Ability to change policy without going through several levels of administrative authority is a positive factor in small schools. The uniquely high accessibility of the superintendent is notable.

8. Availability of human resources, particularly well-prepared teachers, is a moderately positive factor. However, 123 respondents of 359 total rated this factor as "neutral, no effect." The existence of minimum foundation funds from the state and the somewhat favorable community resources probably make this factor less negative in the schools surveyed than it would be in less well-to-do areas or in other states.

9. Availability of educational resources, particularly library facilities, is rated as negative by 150 of 362 respondents. The mean response is practically a 3, or "neutral, no effect." However, the large number of negative ratings indicates that educational resources are limited enough to constitute a problem for the personnel in small schools.

10. Availability of an adequate school plant is rated positive by the persons surveyed. Generally, small schools seem to have about the same facilities on a smaller scale as large schools.

11. Depth and variety of course offerings is rated as a negative factor. Teachers and administrators recognize the limited curriculum offerings as one of the inherent problems of small schools. A number of respondents commented that depth is quite distinct from variety. Obviously an individual course may have depth. But the lack of variety in choice or the lack of advanced courses for depth of study constitute a problem when the effectiveness of the small school, particularly in college preparation, is compared to that of the larger school.

12. Availability of varied racial and economic mixtures in the school population is a positive factor in the small school. The small school has little exclusiveness about it. Everyone in the community is represented in the same school; often grades one through twelve share the same campus and facilities.

13. Teaching in a small school is seen as different from teaching in a large school by a significant number—209 of 357 respondents. However, 105 agreed that teaching was *not* different in the small school. The variance might be explained by differing concepts of the roles of teachers on the one hand, balanced by those who feel that "teaching is teaching," regardless of the location.

14. Response to the statement that teaching in a small school is different enough to merit special attention in teacher education was quite mixed. Teachers in small schools seem to feel that teaching is not really different or that teacher education does not offer many answers to the problems of small schools.

15. Many personnel do feel that a course in rural education might be useful. However, 146 respondents of 360 disagreed with the statement, perhaps indicating again the feelings mentioned in item 14, above.

16. Personnel in small schools definitely feel that these schools can provide reasonable-quality education now and in the next two decades. In spite of certain deficits in educational resources and course offerings, teachers and administrators in small schools have very positive feelings that quality education is possible in the small school in the immediate future.

17. Educators in small schools respond quite positively to the continued existence of the small school beyond the year 2000. This response is a part of the remarkable confidence and faith shown by the respondents in the present and future of the small secondary school.

18. Teachers and administrators in small schools show considerable disagreement in reaction to the statement, "The curriculum of a small school can be and should be a miniature of the curriculum of a large school." Perhaps the disagreement reveals a basic difference of opinion about the role of the small school.

19. Slightly more than half of the personnel in small schools do not agree that the small size of a school must necessarily make its curriculum limited. Several respondents commented that with enough financial support and commitment from responsible agencies, small schools could rival large schools' cirriculums, but that the costs might be prohibitive.

20. Personnel in small schools feel strongly that if their own children attended such a school, they could receive an adequate education. Of 361 respondents only 18 disagreed.

The following recommendations are suggested in light of the survey results:

1. Close positive inter-personal relationships are a feature of the small school. A study of the effects of this factor, specifically as it affects students' later learning and adaptive capacity, might reveal new or clarified goals for the small school.

2. The curriculum of small schools should not be a poor imitation of that of large schools. Small schools need to be allowed more flexibility by state agencies in regard to curriculum organization and content. Experimentation should be encouraged.

3. Teaching in a small school may require different competencies or additional competencies from those necessary for teaching in a large school. An effort should be made to identify these competencies.

4. Teacher education should address itself to the preparation of teachers for small schools. Field experience, particularly practice teaching in the small school, seems warranted even at considerable extra effort and expense.

Appendix A

STATUS OF VERY SMALL SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Questionnaire

Respondent is: Administrator _____ Teacher _____ Both _____
Other duties _____
Approximate number of pupils in grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 _____

This questionnaire attempts to gain some opinions about the current and future needs of very small secondary schools. Would you please respond to the following items?

Use the following response scale for this section:

1 – Definitely negative effect (bad influence)
2 – Negative effect
3 – Neutral, no effect
4 – Positive effect
5 – Definitely positive effect (good influence)

What effect (in your opinion) do the size and location of your school have upon the following? Please place a 1 through 5 response in the blank.

_____ 1. Close teacher-pupil relationships.
_____ 2. Possibility of having small classes.
_____ 3. Favorable community support of the school.
_____ 4. Close pupil-pupil relationships.
_____ 5. Remoteness from urban problems.
_____ 6. Ability to change policy without going through several levels of administrative authority.
_____ 7. Availability of human resources, particularly well-prepared teachers.
_____ 8. Availability of educational resources, particularly library facilities.
_____ 9. Availability of an adequate school plant.
_____ 10. Depth and variety of course offerings.
_____ 11. Availability of varied racial and economic mixtures in the school population.

Comments, if any:

Use the following response scale for this section:

1 – Completely disagree
2 – Disagree
3 – Neutral
4 – Agree
5 – Completely agree

_____ 1. Teaching in a small school is not really different in any meaningful way from teaching in a large school.

_____2. Teaching in a small school is different enough to merit special attention in teacher education.

_____3. A course in "Rural Education" somewhat like one in "Urban Education" might be useful for teacher preparation.

_____4. Small schools can provide a reasonable quality of education now and in the next two decades.

_____5. Given normal change and adequate support, I can see the typical small school functioning beyond the year 2000.

_____6. No one method or teaching strategy is clearly applicable in an exclusive way to teaching in a small school.

_____7. The curriculum of a small school can be and should be a miniature of the curriculum of a large school.

_____8. The small size of a school must necessarily make its curriculum limited.

_____9. If my child attended a very small secondary school, he/she could receive an adequate education.

Comments, if any:

Could you in a phrase or sentence indicate your opinion as to the best and worst feature of small schools?

Best–

Worst–

Appendix B

EFFECTS OF SIZE AND LOCATION OF SCHOOL

Item 1.—*Close teacher-pupil relationships.*

		Responses	*Percent*
1	Definitely negative	1	.27
2	Negative effect	2	.55
3	Neutral, no effect	4	1.10
4	Positive effect	112	30.93
5	Definitely positive	243	67.12
	Totals	362	99.97

Mean response 4.6408

Item 2.—*Possibility of having small classes.*

		Reponses	*Percent*
1	Definitely negative	1	.25
2	Negative effect	4	1.10
3	Neutral, no effect	16	4.41
4	Positive effect	124	34.25
5	Definitely positive	217	59.94
	Totals	362	99.95

Mean response 4.5248

Note: The small size of the school does not necessarily imply that small classes exist.

Item 3.—*Favorable community support of the school.*

		Responses	*Percent*
1	Definitely negative	2	.54
2	Negative effect	10	2.74
3	Neutral, no effect	25	6.86
4	Positive effect	155	42.58
5	Definitely positive	172	47.25
	Totals	364	99.97

Mean response 4.3324

Item 4.—*Close pupil-pupil relationships.*

	Responses	*Percent*
1 Definitely negative	1	.27
2 Negative effect	3	.82
3 Neutral, no effect	24	6.57
4 Positive effect	166	45.47
5 Definitely positive	171	46.84
Totals	365	99.96

Mean response 4.3780

Item 5.—*Remoteness from urban problems.*

	Responses	*Percent*
1 Definitely negative	1	.27
2 Negative effect	25	6.88
3 Neutral, no effect	76	20.93
4 Positive effect	137	37.74
5 Definitely positive	124	34.15
Totals	363	99.97

Mean response 3.9862

Item 6.—*Ability to change policy without going through several levels of administrative authority.*

	Responses	*Percent*
1 Definitely negative	8	2.22
2 Negative effect	23	6.38
3 Neutral, no effect	77	21.38
4 Positive effect	162	45.00
5 Definitely positive	90	25.00
Totals	360	99.98

Mean response 3.8416

Item 7.—*Availability of human resources, particularly well-prepared teachers.*

	Responses	*Percent*
1 Definitely negative	2	.55
2 Negative effect	57	15.87
3 Neutral, no effect	123	34.26
4 Positive effect	124	34.54
5 Definitely positive	53	14.76
Totals	359	99.98

Mean response 3.4707

Item 8.—*Availability of educational resources, particularly library facilities.*

		Responses	*Percent*
1	Definitely negative	24	6.62
2	Negative effect	126	34.80
3	Neutral, no effect	77	21.27
4	Positive effect	97	26.79
5	Definitely positive	38	10.49
	Totals	362	99.97

Mean response 2.9972

Item 9.—*Availability of an adequate school plant.*

		Responses	*Percent*
1	Definitely negative	4	1.11
2	Negative effect	46	12.77
3	Neutral, no effect	101	28.05
4	Positive effect	123	34.16
5	Definitely positive	86	23.88
	Totals	360	99.97

Mean response 3.6694

Item 10.—*Depth and variety of course offerings.*

		Responses	*Percent*
1	Definitely negative	33	9.21
2	Negative effect	161	44.97
3	Neutral, no effect	79	22.06
4	Positive effect	64	17.87
5	Definitely positive	21	5.86
	Totals	358	99.97

Mean response 2.6620

Item 11.—*Availability of varied racial and economic mixtures in the school population.*

		Responses	*Percent*
1	Definitely negative	14	3.88
2	Negative effect	46	12.77
3	Neutral, no effect	143	39.72
4	Positive effect	87	24.16
5	Definitely positive	70	19.44
	Totals	360	99.97

Mean response 3.4250

Appendix C

AGREE-DISAGREE RATINGS

Item 1.–*Teaching in a small school is not really different in any meaningful way from teaching in a large school.*

		Responses	*Percent*
1 Completely disagree		64	17.92
2 Disagree		145	40.61
3 Neutral		43	12.04
4 Agree		72	20.16
5 Completely agree		33	9.24
	Totals	357	99.97

Mean response 2.6218

Item 2.–*Teaching in a small school is different enough to merit special attention in teacher education.*

		Responses	*Percent*
1 Completely disagree		33	9.16
2 Disagree		113	31.38
3 Neutral		87	24.16
4 Agree		108	30.00
5 Completely agree		19	5.27
	Totals	360	99.97

Mean response 2.9083

Item 3.–*A course in "Rural Education" somewhat like one in "Urban Education" might be useful for teacher preparation.*

		Responses	*Percent*
1 Completely disagree		24	6.52
2 Disagree		69	18.75
3 Neutral		93	25.27
4 Agree		140	38.04
5 Completely agree		42	11.41
	Totals	368	99.99

Mean response 3.2907

Item 4.–*Small schools can provide a reasonable quality of education now and in the next two decades.*

		Responses	*Percent*
1 Completely disagree		2	.55
2 Disagree		21	5.78
3 Neutral		22	6.06
4 Agree		132	36.36
5 Completely agree		186	51.23
	Totals	363	99.98

Mean response 4.3195

Item 5.–*Given normal change and adequate support, I can see the typical small school functioning beyond the year 2000.*

		Responses	*Percent*
1 Completely disagree		17	4.70
2 Disagree		29	8.03
3 Neutral		38	10.52
4 Agree		148	40.99
5 Completely agree		129	35.73
	Totals	361	99.97

Mean response 3.9501

Item 6.–*No one method or teaching strategy is clearly applicable in an exclusive way to teaching in a small school.*

		Responses	*Percent*
1 Completely disagree		5	1.39
2 Disagree		10	2.79
3 Neutral		37	10.33
4 Agree		190	53.07
5 Completely agree		116	32.40
	Totals	358	99.98

Mean response 4.1229

Item 7.–*The curriculum of a small school can be and should be a miniature of the curriculum of a large school.*

		Responses	Percent
1 Completely disagree		28	7.82
2 Disagree		131	36.59
3 Neutral		53	14.80
4 Agree		110	30.72
5 Completely agree		36	10.05
	Totals	358	99.98

Mean response 2.9860

Item 8.–*The small size of a school must necessarily make its curriculum limited.*

		Responses	Percent
1 Completely disagree		49	13.57
2 Disagree		123	34.07
3 Neutral		33	9.14
4 Agree		136	37.67
5 Completely agree		20	5.54
	Totals	361	99.99

Mean response 2.8753

Item 9.–*If my child attended a very small secondary school, he/she could receive an adequate education.*

		Responses	Percent
1 Completely disagree		4	1.10
2 Disagree		8	2.21
3 Neutral		23	6.37
4 Agree		133	36.84
5 Completely agree		193	53.46
	Totals	361	99.98

Mean response 4.3933

Appendix D

LIST OF SCHOOLS PARTICIPATING

1. Amherst
2. Anton
3. Aspermont
4. Bledsoe
5. Carney
6. Channing
7. Claude
8. Crowell
9. Fluvanna
10. Fort Davis
11. Glasscock
12. Groom
13. Guthrie
14. Hale Center
15. Hermleigh
16. Jayton-Girard
17. Marathon
18. Matador
19. McLean
20. Meadow
21. Miami
22. Mobeetie
23. New Home
24. Old Glory
25. Patton Springs
26. Pep
27. Quail
28. Rankin
29. Samnorwood
30. Silverton
31. Southland
32. Spade
33. Sterling City
34. Sudan
35. Sundown
36. Texline
37. Union
38. Valentine
39. Vega
40. Weinert
41. Wellman
42. Wheeler
43. Wilson
44. Whiteface
45. Whitharral